

Meeting Minutes

Project:	Alaska State Rail Plan	
Subject:	Steering Committee Update	
Date:	Thursday, July 23, 2015	
Location:	Phone/Webinar	
Attendees:	Bob Laurie, DOT&PF Marc Luiken, DOT&PF Commissioner Chris Hladick, DCCED Commissioner Maury Parsons, DNR DMLW Director Bill O'Leary, AKRR Wendy Lindskoog, AKRR Bruce Carr, AKRR	Tom Brigham, HDR Laurie Cummings, HDR Julie Jessen, HDR Tyler Rose, WPYR

Following introductions, Bob Laurie, DOT&PF, explained the reason and purpose of preparing an Alaska State Rail plan. In addition to setting State policy for rail, it will allow the state to pursue projects and funding at the federal level. The plan is required by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA, 2008).

The Steering Committee provides overall guidance to the plan.

Julie Jessen, HDR, reviewed involvement by the Technical Advisory Group and previous public meetings related to the plan's development.

Tom Brigham, HDR, reviewed the Vision, Goals, Objectives, Findings, and Recommendations. Highlights include:

- Economic development may justify future expansions. The State should consider transportation corridors and not just road transportation for possible resource development.
- There are some improvements and projects beyond the capacity of existing rail operators to provide, and the state may need to provide additional capital support.
- At-grade crossings had originally been recommended for National Highway System (NHS) crossings; that has been expanded to include major highways and as many other roadways as possible based on a new NHS definition.
- Preservation, capacity, and efficiency refer to the systems themselves.
- Right of way protection is recommended for future full expansion of Alaska's railroads.
- Regional Transit Authorities are particularly important to Anchorage and Mat-Su. Legislation has been introduced previously and, while it is supported generally, has not received enough traction to bring it to fruition.
- State rail policy should fund projects that solve public problems and provide broad public benefit. This may require creation of a state rail investment capital budget.

Ultimately a strong and functional rail system will help achieve the state's economic development goals. As part of that, the plan recommends that Alaska Railroad Corporation remain an independent state corporation.

Tom also brought attention to short and long-term projects recommended in the plan. Short term is less than 4 year timeframe; long-term is 5 years or more.

In particular, Tyler Rose, WP&YR, highlighted a more positive outlook for future freight rail service for WP&YR. The company is reviewing the opportunity.

Bob reminded the group that this is a statewide plan that will be integrated into the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan. Following approval by Commissioner Luiken on behalf of the Governor, the plan will be submitted to the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) for review and approval. The plan is anticipated to be submitted to FRA in October or November 2015.

Marty Parsons, DNR, recommended coordinating with the survey and lands team in the Division of Mining Land and Water early in project development to identify any land use, ownership, or corridor issues. The group acknowledged the need for a better policy or system to work together on right-of-way issues.

Participants thanked the project team for their work on what they consider to be a workable document. They will be provided with a red-line copy of proposed changes made as a result of public review and will have an opportunity to review the document before it becomes final.